



Becoming a Country Markets Cook

A practical guide for a better business





Introduction

Whether you are intending to make a living from the products you make, or want to expand a hobby, being a Country Markets Cook is like running a small business. This guide will answer some of your questions about setting up a new venture as a Country Markets Cook, from the equipment you will need to the decisions you will make about pricing your products.

Joining the Country Markets Cooks offers you the opportunity to contribute to the growing interest in high quality, homemade, wholesome food. It also brings rewarding friendships and a sense of belonging to a very sociable organisation: one that works and helps at the very centre of the local community.

Why join Country Markets?

For more than 90 years a network of Country Markets has been selling homemade baked goods, preserves and home grown fruit, vegetables, plants and crafts across England, Wales and the Channel Islands, as well as participating in farmers' markets and other local markets and food fairs.

Country Markets Ltd is a co-operative social enterprise with about 12,000 members. Our aim is to promote diverse and delicious local food to the public and our organisation prides itself on the quality of its products and for keeping traditions alive, as well as creating friendly shopping environments.

Alongside the opportunity for Country Markets Cooks to sell their products through local retail outlets such as community and village shops, farm shops and garden centres, Cooks can sell through local Country Markets. All goods must be home-produced by the members themselves; Country Markets Cooks do not buy-in goods for resale, nor sell on behalf of third parties.

Country Markets provides a training, information and education service for its producers, researching and disseminating information regarding current legislation from DEFRA, Trading Standards Officers, Environmental Health Officers and other regulatory bodies.

As a Country Markets producer selling through retail outlets, you will be supported by a Business Support Adviser in establishing your business; given access to the members' area of the Cooks of Country Markets website. There you will find a bespoke labelling programme, which allows you to build and save labels which are legally compliant. You will also have access to the producer toolkit, with all the guidelines, templates and tools that you require to build a professional business.

The **Country Markets Handbook and guidelines** are vital tools for all producers. They contain important information about producing for Country Markets and the rules are there as a safety net. By following them, a producer can be confident that they are taking all possible steps to ensure that products are of a very high standard and are safe and legal.

Legislation can be complex, especially that concerning food safety and, as a Country Markets Cook, you will be kept informed of the latest requirements through our publications such as new policy guidelines and the quarterly newsletter, *The Markets Messenger*.



Joining the Country Markets Cooks brings rewarding friendships and a sense of belonging to a very sociable organisation: one that works and helps at the very centre of the local community



The benefits of Country Markets membership

Membership costs just 5 pence and Country Markets has all the experience and tools you will need to help you create a better business. We can provide you with:

- *The opportunity for flexible, manageable employment for local people tied to the home or to fit around other commitments*
- *Belonging to a sociable, long-standing, respected and co-operative organisation and being part of the local community*
- *The recognition of a brand that is known to shoppers for its high quality products, friendly experience and contribution to local communities*
- *Access to retail outlets and existing Markets through which to sell your products*
- *Professional information on the legal, technical and other specialist aspects of cooking for sale*
- *A support network of Business Support Advisers and friendly Cooks to support you in getting started and answer your business related queries on anything from recipe ideas to sales*
- *Marketing and promotion materials tailored for the Cooks of Country Markets*
- *Product and Public Liability insurance provided for Country Markets members*
- *The opportunity to earn money doing something you really enjoy and gain some independence*
- *Confidence from the knowledge that Country Markets Cooks are recognised as skilful and valued with traditional skills increasingly recognised as important*
- *The opportunity to contribute to the growing interest in food and its provenance*

If you would like more information about becoming a Country Markets Cook visit www.cooksofcountrymarkets.co.uk

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What do you want to achieve?

For any business, even a hobby, the likelihood of success will depend on how much planning is done at the beginning. It is essential that you are clear on what it is you want to achieve: Country Markets Cooks can be small scale hobbyists or businesses that generate an income.

Starting any business is like a journey and there are a number of questions to consider as you think through whether it will be right for you:

- ❑ Where would you like your business to be?
- ❑ Where are you now?
- ❑ What do you need to do to get there?
- ❑ What resources will you need?
- ❑ What things could go wrong and what can you do to avoid them?

Where would you like your business to be?

As a Country Markets Cook you have the flexibility to grow your sales to suit your personal circumstances. For most Country Markets Cooks, being able to sell under the Country Markets label is a great opportunity to start a new business or a hobby for a lifetime.

Country Markets Cooks get involved for a wide range of reasons:

- ❑ To make a living
- ❑ To gain some independence
- ❑ To contribute to the household income
- ❑ To make some 'pin' money, for a holiday or other fund
- ❑ To build personal confidence
- ❑ To meet other people with similar interests in food and cooking
- ❑ To have fun doing something they love
- ❑ To have a new hobby or something else to do

Whether you get involved for financial or social reasons, as a Country Markets Cook you will find it a rewarding experience. Unlike a regular job you have the flexibility to do as much or as little as you like. You can begin small and stay small or, if you enjoy a bigger challenge, you can develop the business over time.

Where are you now?

Why would you like to start a new business? Think about the things that interest you as well as things you are good at and you enjoy:

- ❑ Do you know any other Country Markets Cooks?
- ❑ Does self-employment, even for hobby sales, interest you?
- ❑ Are you ready, willing and able to manage a small business?
- ❑ Where do your talents lie; what are you best at cooking?
- ❑ What equipment do you have?
- ❑ What time have you available?

What do you need to do to get there?

There are a number of things to consider when starting up: what to cook and sell; how to display your products and what price to charge. We will cover a few of the key areas in more detail later.

Are you ready, willing and able to run a small business? This is an important question when starting out. Country Markets Cooks have to know how to cook but also love cooking enough to do it on a larger scale than simply feeding family and friends.

There are skills and knowledge that will greatly add to your prospects for a successful and enjoyable business:

Personal qualities Some personal qualities are essential for success: typically, Country Markets Cooks find it easy to get motivated, are good organisers, are strong on attention to detail, are flexible and open to change and are committed to meeting consistently the quality standard that their product promises.

Practical skills and knowledge Being a Country Markets Cook is similar to working in any other small business. You will need a range of skills and knowledge, some of which you will need from day one, such as a Level 2 Food Hygiene certificate, whilst others can be developed over time with help and advice from our technical support services and conversations with other Country Markets Cooks.



Starting any business is like a journey of discovery

Joining Country Markets six years ago enabled Elaine to give up her day-time job to make a living doing what she loves: cooking! She first started selling preserves to use up a glut of apples. She now produces savoury dishes, especially game pies and casseroles, and unusual preserves for two Country Markets in South Yorkshire, and sells her speciality jellies into local shops.



Elaine's husband is a gun dog trainer and has permission to pick from the hedgerows; his foraging finds its way into Elaine's tasty preserves.

"Everyone in Country Markets is very supportive. I enjoy the camaraderie of it all, meeting people who have lots of talent and who have time to talk and share," says Elaine.

As a Country Markets Cook selling through retail outlets you are likely to get involved in:

- Developing new products and recipes: you may already do this but continual development of your product range will help maintain customer interest
- Buying ingredients and other supplies: you will need to keep a stock of ingredients and packaging to resource your new venture. Where and what you buy will depend on the values that you place on each (see page 8)
- Producing food for retail sale: there are legal requirements for running a food business from home so you will need an understanding of the professional information you will receive as a Country Markets member on the legal, technical and other specialist aspects of cooking for sale
- Keeping your equipment clean and in condition: just as you would maintain your fridge, cooker and other kitchen equipment for home use, you will need to do the same as a Country Market Cook to support your business activity and operate a food safety management system
- Quality control: you will also need to be your own best critic to ensure that the products you sell always meet your own high standards. Be honest with yourself if they don't: selling something which is under par will be bad for business in the long run

- Selling to retailers: persuading a retailer to stock your products is half the battle; if they are confident in them and in you, then the shopper is likely to be too
- Retailer service: developing an honest relationship with the retailer is important to gain their trust
- Marketing to shoppers: it is important to develop an understanding about what makes customers 'tick' (more about this on page 12); you should find a balance between what the shopper will buy as well as what you would like to bake
- Creating an attractive display: taking the time to draw attention to all your mouth watering products
- Planning and managing finances: as with any business venture, it is important to have a simple system to manage money coming in and going out of the business and, of course, you are required to keep various records for the tax man

Don't be daunted by this list, we all do a lot of it in our everyday lives and we have a lot of experienced Country Markets Cooks who will be happy to advise and help you.

Most of us are used to buying what is needed to feed either ourselves or our families, and many of us regularly adapt or develop recipes depending on what is in the cupboard. Again, we might not all be experts but most of us have an understanding about producing food which is safe to eat, storing it correctly and keeping the kitchen clean and tidy.

Have you ever convinced a friend that they look great when they are lacking in confidence or persuaded someone out for a drink when they were adamant that they didn't want to go? The power of persuasion at work! Choosing clothes, a new decorating scheme or garden plan are all ways in which we use our creativity; and how about managing the household budget and keeping records of our banking transactions, pension or employment documents?

What things could go wrong and what can I do to avoid them?

As a Country Markets Cook, you will have access to a wide range of advice and support when you are starting. Selling your product under our nationally recognised brand will bring marketing benefits and customer assurance. However, as with anything in life, it is worth thinking through the things that could go wrong and taking steps to ensure they don't impact on your business or hobby.

The table opposite identifies a number of areas to think about and possible solutions as you plan your new venture.



What could go wrong?	Possible action?
Loss of money invested in equipment	Initially keep investment to a minimum, for example, to begin with purchase only essential extra equipment; buy small quantities of packaging and buy in labels rather than investing in a printer.
Loss of customers	Take steps to diversify your customer base (don't have all your eggs in one basket!): Be proactive with your relationships with customers and above all, always welcome constructive criticism, no matter how painful it may seem at the time. Consider selling in a Country Market as well as through retail outlets.
Product quality is not good enough to sell	Play to your strengths from day one and keep your range simple. Draw on the network of Country Markets Cooks for advice and tips. Consider going on an advanced cooking course to develop new skills and get ideas.
Bad debts: not paid by a retail outlet	Check out your retail outlet customer before starting to supply: does the store look busy? Is there visible investment around the store? Ask to be paid in cash when you deliver the products to the store.
Unable to cook because of illness	Have a back-up plan: make arrangements with another Cook just in case you need help meeting an order. You may have a holiday cover arrangement that you could call on in an emergency. Note that for food hygiene reasons, you must not produce food for sale if you or someone in your household is unwell (or have been in the last 48hrs) with diarrhoea or sickness, or if you have infected wounds or sores.
A product quality or safety problem	Understand and follow the procedures in the Country Markets Ltd Handbook. If in doubt about your cooking or hygiene skills and knowledge, keep to low risk products. Remember that as a Country Markets Cook you have Product and Public Liability Insurance.

Getting started

Deciding what to cook and sell

This is the first question for many Country Markets Cooks: what will be the right product range to cook and sell. In most cases it is best to start with the things you do well and keep it simple; you can always expand the range over time. This may help refresh the display and remind everyone that you are keen to develop your skills and sales; don't be afraid to try something new every now and then.

Factors which are likely to affect your decisions about what to cook and sell will include:

- ❑ the products other Country Markets Cooks or retail outlets are already selling. There is little point producing something that a colleague is already selling and, whilst it is good to offer a choice to the customer, a similar product to one already being sold must be carefully pitched.
- ❑ the sales space available at the retail outlet or Country Market
- ❑ the products which customers are likely to be interested in and willing to buy. This will depend on a number of factors such as the shoppers' personal likes and dislikes and what they can afford.
- ❑ the products that are likely to make a profit. Be careful that the product you are making can command a fair price for you, the retailer and the shopper.

Seasonal products A change in the product range can create fresh interest in the display and encourage shoppers to buy the product. A look at the calendar will give you the dates for key events during the year. Christmas is an obvious time to tailor your range with a seasonal flavour, and why not try something different at Mother's Day, Father's Day and Easter? Have a look at the calendar on the Country Markets website to help you plan your year's activity.



Start with the things you do well and keep it simple

The resources will you need

In addition to your time there are other resources you will need when starting out: equipment and money.

Equipment Typically, a Country Markets Cook will need a selection of the following equipment, depending on the product he or she plans to make.

- ❑ Food mixer and/or food processor: equipment such as this can enable you to make more and could be something to which to aspire.
- ❑ Mixing bowls*
- ❑ Accurate oven*
- ❑ Silicone sheets: can save time and product wastage as guaranteed not to stick!
- ❑ Oven tins and trays*
- ❑ Accurate scales. If you can afford trade scales, these are to be recommended: they can be purchased second hand and can be recalibrated. Kitchen scales can be tested by weighing something with a known weight to check for accuracy*.
- ❑ Thermometer for oven and fridge. These are handy to confirm the accuracy of your built-in oven and fridge thermometers.
- ❑ Stackable cooling wires*
- ❑ Refractometer: to measure sugar content when making sugar preserves for selling through retail outlets
- ❑ Cleaning materials such as antibacterial spray, disposable dishcloths, cotton tea towels and paper towels*
- ❑ Space!* You will need to have somewhere to store extra equipment, packaging material and ingredients, and possibly some product stocks such as preserves, which are often made in large batches

The experience of Country Markets Cooks is that some of these are essential (indicated with an *) whilst others are useful to have when the time is right for you. Investing in an extra set of tins and cooling wires, for example, can be a sound investment as they make available more of your time, increase the amount you can make, or allow you to try making new products.

For most people with an interest in cooking, the equipment in their kitchen suits well when starting out. Country Markets Cooks often say that you "*just need more of everything*" once you are up and running.

Money The financial outlay will depend on the equipment you already have at home and the scale at which you wish to produce. In addition, there is the cost of purchasing ingredients, packaging and labels to consider before you will make any income from sales.

Typically, Cooks will have to spend money on the following items when starting:

- ▣ Some extra equipment
- ▣ Ingredients
- ▣ Packaging
- ▣ Labels

You may decide to purchase a laser printer to produce labels which comply with regulations. However, this is another investment that you could aspire to; choosing to purchase pre-printed labels to begin with will reduce your initial outlay.

Be realistic about the need to make a financial investment in what you are doing, and also how long it might take to re-coup that investment. It can be a number of months before a new business is profitable and generating a cash surplus and when you do make a profit, you may want to re-invest some or all of it to help your business develop.

Buying your ingredients

What you will need to prepare your products falls into two categories: your ingredients and packaging materials. Here we will consider each in turn.

Ingredients Your choice of ingredients will depend on the type and quality of your end product as well as your values about how they are grown and where they come from, for example, locally sourced or organic.

Most Cooks have a preferred source for ingredients, for example their own garden or a co-operative or local supplier.

As a new Country Markets Cook, there are options open to you that you may not have considered previously for home use, for example from:

- ▣ Your own garden
- ▣ Local producers, suppliers and community shops
- ▣ Cash & Carry outlets, such as Makro and Booker

Put some thought into the ingredients you use. Along with the craft skills, the ingredients you use can play a part in the story you wish to tell customers about the quality and authenticity of the products you cook and sell. Some things to consider:

- ▣ Have you a clear specification in mind for the ingredients you use?
- ▣ Is there an ingredient shelf-life limitation on the type and amount you buy?
- ▣ Is there sufficient consistency of ingredient quality and availability?
- ▣ Is there an opportunity for bulk buying co-operation with other Cooks?
- ▣ Will changing the type of ingredient affect the legal label content?



About quality

Quality means different things to different people. Whilst some tend to associate it with more expensive ingredients or cooking techniques, quality is still very relevant to other products. There are two aspects to this:

- Is the product the best it can be, with the ingredients you are using, for the price you are charging?
- Is the standard being achieved consistently every time?

Country Markets Cooks have a **“Sell the best, eat the rest”** mantra when it comes to quality and the products they release for sale. This avoids disappointing customers but of course means that a profit opportunity has been lost. This is the cost of not getting it right and is a great way of focussing your mind on quality.

Cooks are responsible for setting the Best Before (End) date for their products; test the life of your products by using your own judgement about when the quality level becomes unacceptable. The ‘life’ of the product may be quite short but this is a positive demonstration of just how fresh and high quality the products are!

Quality is something to be proud of so take any opportunities to tell your retailer and shoppers about the great ingredients and skill required to make your products.



“Sell the best, eat the rest”

Catherine is a new member of Country Markets; she joined Sheffield Country Market only a few months ago and has already established herself as a top class Cook, making beautifully finished cookies and cupcakes.



Catherine (24) is a PhD student researching Breast Cancer; baking has been a hobby for a long time and she really enjoys it. Being a producer for Country Markets is a way of sharing it, supporting the hobby and of earning extra cash.

“There are lots of shops now selling up-market cake products – but they are not really homemade. I wanted to show people that you

can make lovely homemade goodies which are real and just as pretty, without the mass produced element!”

When Catherine started to look into selling her food it all seemed very complicated and daunting. She felt that she couldn’t possibly cover the start up costs on her own. Having found Country Markets, she soon recognised that joining gave her a low risk way to find customers with lots of support about labeling, packaging, and marketing, and practical local support from her fellow producers.

Meeting the legal requirements

There is a range of food hygiene, labelling and other legislation that applies to food production for retail sale and this is enforced by organisations such as Trading Standards and the Environmental Health Department at your local authority. They are intended to protect the consumer and ensure that they are not misled by price or label claims.

Don’t be put off by this. There are many hundreds of Country Markets Cooks making and selling products every week around the country. Country Markets Ltd has made arrangements with the enforcement organisations to put in place practical help and solutions to make legal compliance easier. All the information you will need is available in the Country Markets Handbook.

There are numerous Food hygiene training courses on offer – it is important that the course you choose is approved by a national body and the Country Markets handbook gives advice on this; some Markets and Societies offer financial assistance to help cover the cost of training.

Packaging your products

To reinforce the strong Cooks of Country Markets branding, we have developed a branded range of packaging and labels. The labels are built by you the producer on a bespoke, internet-based programme, which, together with the guidelines, is designed to lead you through the process of producing labels compliant with the relevant regulations.

Country Markets has also developed a range of compostable packaging for our Cooks. As well as providing an attractive showcase for your products the compostable qualities of the packaging fit well with our community values and will be of increasing interest to customers over time. The simple boxing is designed to protect the products on the shop shelf and also reduce the amount of time spent in packaging your products so increasing profitability. To find out more about packaging and labelling, see the guidelines in the Selling through Retail Outlets Handbook.



Pricing your products

Getting the finances right Even if you are not producing for the primary reason of making an income, it still makes sense to think about the financial aspects of your work, in particular knowing your costs and deciding on the right price to charge the retailer and shopper.

Knowing your costs Most businesses are constantly looking to control costs in the face of upward pressures such as inflation and higher energy prices. Take the time to calculate the cost of producing and getting your product to the outlet. Get into the habit of reviewing your costs regularly, say every three months.

Once you know your costs, you can manage them. The direct costs of ingredients and packaging are usually straight forward to calculate. However, other costs may be less visible and measurable, for example the cost of operating your cooker.

For some Country Markets Cooks the calculation of the cost of their time can be a challenge. Firstly, how long have they spent on the product (cooking, delivery time, buying ingredients) and secondly, how can they be more efficient in the way they work, for example, filling the oven every time.

The right retail price Time spent on getting the price right for your product is a good investment. The challenge is not necessarily to find the maximum price but the right, or optimum, price that will generate the best return for you and, if you are selling through a retailer, for the retail outlet.

There are a number of approaches that people use to determine the optimum retail price that the shopper pays for a product. The simplest way to approach the topic is to think of a range and start at the two ends.

- **Cost to supply:** At bottom end is the minimum price you need to cover all your costs. This is the price below which the product does not make sense because it is costing you money to produce. This figure should include an estimate of all costs.
- **Value to customer:** At the top end of the range is the value that the product is worth to the shopper. This is less easy to calculate and is often a function of the built-in benefits they get from the product as well as the convenience from buying it at a particular location, for example a shopper may be

prepared to pay more for a pint of milk from the corner shop because it is often purchased as an emergency and saves the shopper valuable time.

Between the two extremes lie a number of options:

- **Cost to supply:** the cost price plus a percentage mark up to reflect your profit aspiration.
- **Competitor prices:** the price that a comparable product may be purchased at elsewhere.
- **What the market will bear:** this will reflect the local circumstances in the area and, of course, in comparison to other products in the store.

Visit supermarkets and other retailers to see what prices they charge. However, be confident about the value and worth of your products. If a product is much superior to that in a supermarket, don't be afraid to price it higher. Sometimes we risk pricing products at unprofitable levels just because a small number of customers mention the price: if this is a concern, consider introducing a variation of the product that you can make and sell more cheaply alongside your other one.

Prices to a retailer When selling your products through a retail outlet think of the retailer as a middle-man who helps you get your products to the shoppers who will buy and love your products. They provide you with premises and space to showcase your products and of course, access to the customers that visit their outlet and the staff that serve them. They will expect a share of the money for their efforts and this is called the retailer's margin.



Time spent on getting the price right for your product is a good investment

It is worth taking the lead when discussing pricing with a retailer. Have confidence in your products and what they are worth. The price you charge is of critical importance to your success: if you don't make enough money, you may lose heart or be forced to compromise on the ingredients you use. It is all about preparation and three steps will help with your price discussions with a retailer:

The words retailers use like Margin and Mark-up can be confusing and here is an explanation:

Both terms relate to the difference between the price that the shopper pays and the price you charge the retailer. In simple terms, both measure the retailer's share of the price the shopper pays.

Gross margin is the difference as a percentage of the price the shopper pays. Bigger retailers tend to use this calculation when making decisions about the products they sell.

Mark-up is the difference as a percentage of the price you charge the retailer. Smaller retailers tend to use this approach: they will generally have a percentage mark-up figure in mind for the products they sell.

To illustrate the numbers behind it all:

If a product you sell to a retailer at 80p is sold to shoppers at £1.00, the Gross margin is 20% (£1.00 - 80p as a percentage of £1.00) and the Mark-up is 25% (£1.00 - 80p as a percentage of 80p).

Firstly, think about your pricing options listed above and work out the most appropriate price to sell the product to the shopper. Fix this with the retailer for each product: remember that you are the expert and try to keep control over every aspect of your marketing, including the selling price to shoppers.

Secondly, investigate the Mark-up or Gross margin percentage that the retailer aspires to earn: speak to other Cooks selling through the outlet or ask the retailer as part of your preparations for a meeting with them.

Lastly, when you have the retail selling price and margin level, you can work out the cost price to the retailer. If this figure is not high enough for you, you may have to consider a lower margin percentage to the retailer or a higher retail price.

Remember that you will need to make enough to cover any promotional activity you do. This is an investment in your retailer's business and don't be afraid to point this out when discussing pricing. Whatever you decide, when you have agreement with the retailer, confirm the details in writing. This may help reduce confusion and avoid problems later on if, for example, the people change at the retailer.

Marketing your products

Marketing is a wide ranging term to cover everything from understanding what shoppers want to buy to running a sales promotion. In simple terms, it is about getting the right product to the right place at the right time and making a profit whilst doing so!

It is helpful to think about four topics (all starting with a P!): Product, Price, Promotion and Place:

- **Product:** Is it the right thing for you and the customer? Is the quality just right for the market? Will enough customers want to buy it?
- **Price:** What is the optimum price you can sell it at? Will this price give you a profit?
- **Promotion:** How will you generate customer interest in your products on sale in the Market or at a retail outlet? How will you tell them your story about quality, craft skills and great ingredients?
- **Place:** Where is the best place to sell your produce? What suits you, for example, a weekly Market or a local village shop?

As a Country Markets Cook, you will benefit from a national brand and a support network with expertise on all aspects of your business to help you consider these points. Just remember that you have options on each of these four areas and that what you do will have implications for the profitability of your venture.

The Country Markets brand The Cooks of Country Markets brand has been specially developed for sales through retail outlets and the design brings a contemporary feel that complements our tradition and heritage.

Research identified the significant strengths (the essence) within Country Markets as being real people; real homemade food, crafts and products; a community spirited, personal, unique, local and long-standing, cooperative organisation.

Country Markets is investing in the promotion of the brand on behalf of Country Markets Cooks. However, any brand is only as good as the experience of the shopper when they are exposed to it.

Our Country Markets Cooks are ambassadors for the brand and we encourage all to take care to make sure that every customer experience is a positive one. Be friendly and presentable when delivering or re-stocking a display: remember that shoppers will form an opinion of the Cooks of Country Markets from what they experience of seeing and meeting Cooks first hand.

Research your market Finding out more about what people will buy does not need to be complicated. Ask other Country Markets Cooks what products are selling well and what is not. Speak to shoppers in the retail outlet: you could develop a simple questionnaire and interview people in the retail outlet (with the retailer's permission, of course) or Market.

Chat to the retailer – they may have ideas about new or unusual lines they would like to stock, which you may well be able to supply.



Selling your products

To sell through a retail outlet will require someone to make a compelling case to the retailer that the product range will make a positive contribution to the store both financially and for its shoppers.

If this was not enough to get on with, you will need to convince the retailer that your product offering is better than that of the competition!

Don't be daunted by this. Some people think that they will not be good at selling yet they regularly sell ideas to family and friends about things in everyday life. The secret to being a great sales person is to listen more than you talk: we have two ears and one mouth after all! Good sales people take the time to hear and understand what the customer really wants.

Confidence will build with experience and a good track record with one retailer can make the pitch to another much easier. Perhaps you can co-operate with other Country Markets Cooks and nominate someone with more experience to do the selling.

Generally, a new trading relationship with a retailer is best started with a face-to-face meeting. This will increase the chances that they are clear about what you are offering as well as building a personal connection and trust. It is usually more productive and courteous to arrange a meeting in advance to ensure that the retailer will have the time to listen to you, without distractions.

This initial meeting could be arranged by telephone or visit to the outlet. There is a template letter of introduction in the Cooks of Country Markets toolkit in the members' area of the Cooks website: www.cooksofcountrymarkets.co.uk



The secret to being a great sales person is to listen more than you talk

Carol Ratcliff of Cranleigh Country Market explains how she and her colleagues began producing for a local shop:

We know several people, one of whom was a past Markets Adviser, who live in the local retirement village, which has a small supermarket style shop. Many of the residents come to buy from us at our weekly Country Market.

We were aware that the management of this shop had changed so we wrote to the General Manager of the retirement village, asking if our produce would be of interest for them to have in their shop. We also invited them to come to see us on a Friday at our Market to see the standard of presentation and variety of goods for themselves.

We followed up their visit and supplied them with a price list and were then asked to supply a sample order of £100.00 worth of baked goods.

We work as a group of producers through our Market. Each cook has now settled into producing a standard selection of items so that we can supply as great a variety of goods as we can.

We supply the shop weekly, on Wednesdays, with a range of large and small cakes and cookies and we also supply preserves when requested.



The fundamentals of successful selling through a retail outlet are to:

- **Be the expert** Remember that the products are more important to you than the retailer. Selling food may be new in some outlets like a garden centre, so offer to take ownership of the display area and the merchandising of the products. Recommend retail selling prices whilst giving the retailer confidence that the product will sell at those levels.

- **Know your prospective retailer's business** Find out about the shop's trading values, who shops there, what they buy, any gap in their range for your products, whether the business is growing or declining?

Select which retailers to target based on how what they do fits with what you want to do, for example, a community shop in a local village is likely to be interested in local products.

- **Make sure you are talking to someone who can say "Yes"** Usually, within a retail outlet there are only a few people who can say "Yes", perhaps a Store manager. Make sure that you get to speak to the right person. Generally the more senior the person in the organisation's structure, the more likely they will be able to oblige after some persuasion!

- **Explain clearly why shoppers will buy your products** Remember that you are the expert on your product. For any retailer, there will be a risk that the product will not sell. If, based on your experience and understanding of the retail outlet, you believe the product will be successful, tell the retailer why in order to build their confidence.

Tell them about the great taste, your ingredients and the homemade story, as well as why your produce is different from that of the competition. Reassure them about your food safety credentials and the legal compliance back-up from Country Markets. Paint a picture about how the sales success elsewhere can translate into success in their outlet.

Country Markets is able to provide marketing point of sale material for shelving, free for the retailer, to encourage sales of your product. In addition, the retailer will be featured on the Country Markets postcode locator on the website where interested shoppers can find a local outlet in their area.

- **Make a strong commercial case** Outline what is in it for the retailer: tell them about the profit opportunity in pounds and pence over a period of time, say per month and year.

It helps to be flexible at the beginning, for example, waive a minimum order threshold until the range is up and running and sales have settled down.

Tell them about any wider benefits for their business, for example, a more interesting display, more browsing time in the store.

- **Have a 'shopping list'** Get agreement on the things you expect the retailer to do as part of the deal, for example, be specific about the location for the display in the store, the order and delivery arrangements, and the payment terms (when you will receive payment after an invoice has been raised).

It is a good idea to prepare a letter of agreement to summarise the main points to avoid confusion and help resolve any queries in the future.

- **Close the deal** Don't be afraid to press for a decision when you have made your case. Why not memorise some questions and statements in advance.

Be clear on who is doing what after any meeting and get a commitment from the retailer on the follow-up action.

- **Love your retailers** Work hard to keep the relationship positive. Great customer service that makes the retailer's life hassle free will help. Keep communication regular and be proactive with new ideas for sales promotions or a range of changes such as seasonal products.



Customer service

Love your customer As an organisation that is built around people and their local communities, customers expect excellent customer service and a highly personal approach from our Cooks. Be open, honest and transparent and, in the case of retail outlets, don't hide bad news such as a problem with an order or delivery. A retailer that considers you to be reliable and trustworthy will be easier to work with in the future.

Be flexible when it is possible and the business case is sound, for example, where an extra delivery is required.

Above all, remember that the customer has a choice to buy or not buy from you, whether it is a shopper in a Market or your buyer at a retail outlet. It is for this reason that we encourage a *"the customer is always right"* approach to the way Cooks manage customer relationships.

Complaints On occasions, people may make a complaint about your products. It may be that an ingredient is not of consistently high quality or your product has a strong flavour that is not to everyone's taste. If it happens, don't be down-hearted or defensive: think about what you can learn from the experience.

Service standards are important for customers as they help to define what a customer can expect, so it is good customer service to accept a complaint gracefully and immediately offer the customer a solution, for example, their money back or a replacement product. Responding promptly, politely and for the benefit of the customer will go a long way to repairing any damage to your reputation that there might be and will in fact help to build greater trust in your products.

Consider yourself lucky that the customer is prepared to give up valuable time to let you know they have a problem, instead of just walking away – if you think in these terms then a complaint is a gift, which will help you improve your business!

Remember it is a lot easier to keep existing customers than to find new ones.

ADDING THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Staffordshire BSA, Janette Arrowsmith supports six very diverse retail outlets which include a branch of a big garden centre chain, a big shed in a field selling the farm's own meat and vegetables, a community shop run along collective lines, and a shop and café located in a marina.



Janette's approach demonstrates that time spent getting to know each outlet and the varying demands of their business will pay dividends. This means regular visits to keep an eye on stock, check shops are happy with the goods supplied, (amount, quality, pricing), and whenever appropriate suggest they try new or different items. Sometimes Janette will drop by to do personal shopping, which presents another opportunity to cement relationships.

Janette visits each outlet once a month and also emails or telephones on a weekly basis to maintain regular contact. With Fresh and Local, a small family-owned business in Haughton for example, she buys her groceries from them and send emails weekly – either about CM goods or goods she has bought from them. "The staff there are email-minded so there is a regular flow of communication. It is worth while spending time getting to know people. A good relationship works both ways: the outlet trusts us."



Promoting your products

Your product display

The appearance of your products and how they are displayed in a Market or on shelving at a retail outlet will play a key part in your sales success.

In retail this is called merchandising and it is a mix of art and science, with art about the visual appeal and ease of shopping, and the science about the numbers: which products sell well and make the most profit for you and the retailer.

Retailers have researched merchandising over the years and the following are points to consider when preparing an in-store display.

- 'Eye line is buy line': people look up and down afterwards
- Shoppers tend to look at 'hot spots' first, often in the middle of a display
- Impulse purchases can generate considerable sales from an attractive display
- Empty shelves put shoppers off
- Marketing materials should be easy to read and understand (in the retail trade these are known as 'Point of sale' materials)
- There is generally a recognisable traffic-flow past a display

Read more about this topic in our Merchandising and Display guidelines, available in the producer toolkit. A few tips to consider:

Don't be afraid to try something new Retailers test new layouts and in-store locations all the time. How often have you gone into a store and found that things have been moved around! Try new arrangements and measure the business impact: remember that merchandising is about generating sales and profit, not the prettiest display!

Keep your eyes open Observe shoppers around your display. Where do they come from and how does the traffic flow past the display. Look at how they respond to it as they shop around the store. Does it attract any impulse purchases? Where do they look first? How do they react to any promotions you may be running? You can also ask people what they think of the display?

One size does not fit all Different retail outlets will have different shoppers depending on the location, levels of incomes in the area,

etc. What works in one store may need to be adjusted to suit another.

Be proactive Keep your display stocked, neat and tidy. Look at it from a distance to see what the shopper sees. Remember this is, quite literally, your shop window!

MAKE-OVER BOOSTS COUNTRY MARKETS SALES AT CROOKHAM VILLAGE STORES

Producers at Hartley Wintney Country Market in Hampshire can vouch for the impact of effective display after sales of their preserves more than doubled when the owner of Crookham Village Store improved their presentation.

Claude Kensett of Hartley Wintney Country Market and a Business Support Adviser for Indirect Sales, said: "From selling 8-10 jars of our preserves a month, the shop is selling 15-20 a week - it's all down to the 'Mary Portas effect'! David Long, the owner, watched the programme Mary Portas did at Corfe Castle and then went out and bought some wicker baskets and wood wool to put our jars in. He also moved the display from a corner of the adjoining tea-room to a shelf in the store itself. Sales have gone through the roof ever since."

"The wicker baskets were a substantial outlay for the shop but the result is ample proof that in business you need to speculate to accumulate. Our preserves look really attractive in the baskets. We are convinced not all these sales are to villagers in Crookham. With these sales figures, people must be travelling in from other villages to shop in Crookham."



Don't be afraid to try something new!

Why promote your products?

We are all familiar with the wide range of promotional tactics that are used in the supermarkets and some can be effective in increasing your sales. Promotions can attract potential new shoppers, encourage them to buy more often and in large volumes and encourage sales at times of the year when they are seasonally low.

A promotion can also boost sales for your retailer and demonstrate your commitment to their business.

Meet the Cook and taster events Spending time in the store to demonstrate how good your product tastes is a great way of creating interest in the whole display. A friendly face and professional delivery by a Cook from Country Markets can create long lasting trust and loyalty for the brand.

People love taking samples of food and, with some smart planning, you can use the contact with the shopper to generate a sale. Tie in a sales promotion to encourage trial and the case is even more compelling! Look for other products that complement yours, to possibly share costs and make more impact to attract customers.

Why not design your own promotion using the Branding guidelines and design tools in the producer toolkit; a good example is to highlight a different product on a regular basis, such as '**Cake of the week**' or '**Preserve of the week**'.

Competitions These are a useful means of catching the eye of the shopper and can be a successful way of getting someone to try your product. A simple idea might be to offer purchasers of, for example, more than one Cooks of Country Markets product free entry into a draw for a delicious Food Hamper. This would be an ideal promotion for a particular occasion such as Christmas and offers the opportunity for collaboration with other small producers to share the cost.

When you are researching your market, encourage customers to respond to a questionnaire which you have devised to find out what might sell in a particular outlet by advertising that all responses will be entered into a free draw for Cooks of Country Markets products.

Other promotional activity The key to successful promotion is to be clear about what it is you are trying to achieve. Typically, people promote their products to:

- **Encourage trial:** for example a price discount will reduce the risk for a first time buyer.
- **Encourage repeat purchase:** for example, a money-off coupon for the next purchase to bring your customer back for more.
- **Encourage loyalty:** through ongoing, more frequent or larger purchases, for example a multi-buy offer such as a '3 for the price of 2' pack offer. This is a good way to get people to buy more products in a range.

However, the sales success of a promotion can be constrained by insufficient availability of the product and disappointed customers mean lost sales. Think carefully about the likely volume increase in sales: draw on the experience of other Cooks or the people in the retail outlet. Consider making more frequent deliveries to a retail outlet to ensure that stock is available at all times.

Legal aspects There are legal obligations when running promotions. A promotion should be honest and truthful and there is a responsibility not to mislead the shopper by inaccuracy, ambiguity, exaggeration or omission. Be particularly careful if using the word '*Free*': there should be no hidden extra costs when making this claim.



Useful links



Country Markets Ltd
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Get in touch if you would like information about your nearest Business Support Adviser



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www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk



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<http://www.which.co.uk/money/tax/guides/tax-for-the-self-employed/>



<http://www.suma.coop/>



www.bbcgoodfood.com

Check list for selling through retail outlets

Some things to think about when starting out:

Knowing your prospective retailer's business

- ▣ Do I know enough about the retailer's business?
- ▣ Is it growing or standing still?
- ▣ Are there plans to expand or contract?
- ▣ What type of people shop at the store?
- ▣ What do the customers think about the store?
- ▣ Who is the person that can say "Yes" about selling my products?
- ▣ How do I get a meeting with them to discuss my products?

Be the expert

- ▣ Do my products fit /suit the type of people who shop there?
- ▣ If so, what will be the right range of products to sell?
- ▣ Where would be the best place to locate my products?
- ▣ Will this place be clean, dry and secure?
- ▣ Is there sufficient traffic flow of shoppers past the space?
- ▣ How could I display my products to best effect?
- ▣ What is the right, or optimum, retail selling price for each product?

Know your competition

- ▣ Do they sell any other food and drink products?
- ▣ If so, what is the range?
- ▣ Do any of these products compete with mine?
- ▣ What is the product quality like?
- ▣ What prices do they charge?
- ▣ How much do they sell of existing products?

Make a strong commercial case

- ▣ What margin level does the retailer aim to earn?
- ▣ Do I have a compelling case to present to the retailer?
- ▣ Why will their customers want to buy the products?
- ▣ How will the display add to their overall offer to customers?
- ▣ What I will do to make life easy and hassle-free for them (e.g. great customer service, order and delivery flexibility)?
- ▣ What promotions will push sales and excite their shoppers?
- ▣ What will be the profit opportunity for them?

Think about the details

- ▣ Will I need a minimum order value to make it worthwhile?
- ▣ Who will determine how much stock to order from me?
- ▣ How will they work out how much stock to order from me?
- ▣ When will they place orders?
- ▣ When will they require delivery?
- ▣ Will the retailer allow me to do in-store promotional activity, for example, sampling?
- ▣ When will I get paid for the product I deliver?
- ▣ How will the retailer handle any queries or complaints about my product?

Promoting my products

- ▣ Can I spend time with the retail staff to tell them about my products so they can help customers?
- ▣ Are there any seasonal changes in the number of customers visiting the store?
- ▣ If so, by what factor do the figures change so I can plan to avoid too much or too little stock on display?
- ▣ Is the retailer planning any promotional events that may be an opportunity for my sales?

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Will I have to pay tax on the money I earn?

As a self-employed person, you are responsible for paying your own tax and National Insurance contributions.

2. What records will I need to keep?

You will need to keep business records and details of your income so you can fill in an annual Self Assessment tax return to assess whether you will be liable for tax.

3. Do I need to be insured?

As a member of Country Markets you will be covered for product and public liability insurance when you sell your products under the Country Markets label.

Public Liability insurance covers you against any claims made against your business, for example, if you were held legally liable for personal injury, or for damage done to property. The insurance will also cover you for any legal costs associated with defending claims against your business.

If you manufacture or supply goods, there is always the possibility that your product could cause damage to a third party that could be property or another person. A small defect could open you up to claims, so product liability insurance cover is vitally important for product manufacturers.

Country Markets insurance cover:

Public Liability	£5 million
Product Liability	£5 million
Goods in transit	£1,000
Personal accident	Varies depending on injury

The Personal Accident element is a “top up” policy designed to cover those areas not covered by the Public and Product Liability policies usually where no negligence can be shown. It is not normally taken out by a business and can be described as a “perk” for our members. It can pay up to £45 million for very serious accidents with cover reduced for the over 75’s.

4. How difficult are the food safety management requirements?

The *Safer food, better business* food safety management pack has been developed to help small catering businesses such as restaurants, cafés and takeaways comply with food hygiene regulations introduced in January 2006.

The pack has been developed by the Food Standards Agency, working with catering businesses, to be practical and easy to use. Using this pack will help you to:

- comply with food hygiene regulations
- show what you do to make food safely
- protect the reputation of your business
- improve your business, such as by wasting less food

5. Will I need any training and if so how do I access it?

It is Country Markets Ltd policy that all producers preparing food follow a nationally recognised level 2 course in food safety and hygiene and hold a current certificate.

The recommended national approved bodies that run these courses are:

- The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH)
- The Royal Society for Public Health and Hygiene (RSPH)
- The Society of Food Hygiene and Technology (SOFHT)

It is recommended that all courses are tutor-based, however on-line courses are now widely available. It is advisable to check that on-line courses are acceptable to your own local authority.

6. What opportunities are there to sell my products?

As a Country Markets Cook you will be able to sell your goods through retail outlets as well as any of the Markets in the Society to which you belong if you choose to do so.

7. What information do I have to put on labels?

You are required by law to fully label food products sold through retail outlets. As a Country Markets Cook you have access to guidelines and a bespoke labelling programme to help you to produce fully compliant labels.

All prepared food items sold through traditional Country Markets are covered by the category 'pre-packed for direct sales' and this determines the information required on the label. The Country Markets handbook provides guidelines for producing labels for products sold through the Markets.

8. What help will I get from Country Markets?

Country Markets Ltd gives members support with regulations, policy, marketing and publicity, information and packaging. Practical support and advice is also available from a team of Business Support Advisers (contact info@cooksofcountrymarkets.co.uk for details).

9. How much will the Country Markets help cost?

You will have to pay a small fee for the Country Markets Handbook. All additional guidelines, templates and tools for indirect sales are available at no cost on the members' area of the Cooks of Country Markets website.

Notes:

